SADTU REC Induction Workshops, 2015

Report Writing

Pages 41-45 of the SADTU National Induction Manual

Introduction

As an elected Office Bearer of the Union you are accountable to the members. Members should be informed of decisions taken, of projects undertaken, of funds received and the utilization of those funds, of problems facing the organization, etc. Members have a right to know, as they are the owners of the organization. A number of ways exist of ensuring that members are informed. One such way of accountability is by reporting, orally or writing. This allows members to participate in all activities of the organization.

Why are reports necessary?

- Help to participate in the democratic processes of the organisation
- Instill a sense of accountability
- Keep members informed of developments.
- Educate members
- Help to plan and formulate policies or strategies
- Help members to make informed decisions
- It is easier to assess progress

Who do we write reports for?

- For our members, e.g. on an ongoing crisis
- Reports to funders or donors, e.g. on how we have spent our funds for a particular project

  Or, why we need more money etc
- To the media, e.g. on how we view certain issues
- To the executive committee of the organization, e.g. on a conference or workshop we attended
- To other organisation, e.g. on the purpose and function of our organization.

It is important to remember that different people will be interested in different aspects of the organisation. It means that your report to the members will be different from a report that you write to donors. Do not fill a report with unnecessary things, but structure your report in such a way that the readers of the report will find it interesting because the facts in the report are of interest to them. Report writing is a skill that has to be acquired by following guidelines and lots of practice.

How to plan a report?

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is it for?
- Why are you writing the report?
- What do you want to say in the report?

These questions will help you decide what information to include and what to exclude in your report.

Preparation for a report includes a good set of notes. Remember to:

- Draw up plan of the information you want to include.
- Decide what to include, what to leave out, what to emphasize and what to just mention.
- Reorganize your plans so that there is a development of ideas
- Write short, brief paragraphs, using your plan.
- Write your headings and sub-headings
- Number your headings and sub-headings.

Points to note:

- **A well laid out report is easy to read.** Do not forget to include the date, the name of the person writing the report and the title of the report. If you report on a conference, meeting or workshop that took place, include the venue.

- **The report should be interesting so that people can read it**. Do not include unnecessary facts or detail. Rather argue concisely and clearly. The report should not be too long and do not repeat yourself in report.

- **It is important that everyone understands the points being made.** Do not use vague or ambiguous statements. It is easier to organise members around an issue if they understand how that issue effects the personally.

- **Always read your document or report after writing it.** Ensure that it make sense to you!

- **The language used should be understandable to reader**. If you use abbreviations or unfamiliar words a good ider would be to include a word list at the end of your document that very simply explains the difficult words for the reader.

- **Your choice of words is also important**. Instead of referring to "he' or she rather use the position or role of that person eg. Branch Secretary, etc. Give women the same respect as men. You can run the risk of alienating them. Similarly avoid the use of "racist" words.

Different Types of Reports:

Routine reports

These are reports drawn up regularly by office bearers for members; they inform members of the activities of the official, and whether members' decisions have been carried out.

Special Reports

These are reports drawn up after a special event or meeting on a specific issue. They inform members of the special activity that took place. They also inform members of the decisions taken at particular meetings.

How to Report Objectively

When reporting to your structures remember the following:

- Report must be as accurate as possible
- Report on all the views that were put forward, even if they do not agree
- With the decisions taken at the meeting
- Do not mix up facts with personal opinion
- If you include your own opinion on particular issue, the members must be told that it is your opinion

When preparing yourself for verbal reporting:

- Use your set of notes as a list of points, which will help you remember what you want to say
- Write large notes that are well spaced out so that you can read them at glance
- Go through each point clearly and allow members to ask questions
- Use sentences that are short and simple
- Use language that you are familiar with
- Give examples as you go along, where possible.
- If you have to read a report word-by word, then remember to:
    - Pause every now and then to look at the members
    - Explain in your own words some of the points you read out and always vary the tone of your voice.

Tips to help you speak effectively

- Talk clearly and loud enough for everyone to hear (not too loudly though)
- Look at everyone when talking (not just one spot or person)
- Vary the tone of your voice. Only boring speakers use the same flat tone throughout
- Sound interested in what you are saying
- Have confidence in yourself.

Wal Hannington, Extracts from "Mr Chairman", Lawrence and Wishart, 1950-1980

Chairperson

"The Chairman is there to guide the meeting, not to boss it."

Foreword

Many workers have experienced a sense of fear and trepidation when called upon to "take the chair" because they suddenly realise that they are being called upon to undertake a position of responsibility without having the knowledge to enable them to do the job efficiently. Often they invent some excuse for declining the honour whilst inwardly wishing that they could accept.

But even amongst those who do not aspire to the office of Chairman, a knowledge of the rules of procedure is a valuable asset enabling them more intelligently to follow the business of the meeting and to participate in the proceedings instead of being merely passive listeners. It also enables them to assert their rights in the conduct of the meeting if the Chairman behaves in an undemocratic manner towards them.

The importance of a Chairman knowing his job cannot be too strongly emphasised. A Chairman who has a sound knowledge of the rules of debate can occupy his position with complete confidence and knows that he will receive the respect due to his office, even in a meeting where there is a strong difference of opinion.

A Chairman can make all the difference between a successful meeting and a failure. If he is a "good Chairman", he can steer the business through to a successful conclusion, whereas if he is "bad Chairman", he can get himself and the meeting into a hopeless muddle.

Some people are more confident than others, but confidence alone is not sufficient to ensure the orderly conduct of a meeting. A Chairman must have a knowledge of the rules of procedure, otherwise he cannot conduct the business of a meeting efficiently. Confidence without knowledge borders on impudence and an audience will not be long in discovering that weakness.

Preliminaries

From the moment that a meeting opens, whether public or private, to the time that it closes, the Chairman has the responsibility for seeing that it is conducted in an orderly and business-like manner. He does so by guiding the proceedings in accordance with certain established rules, through which he controls the meeting and ensures that the business is dealt with efficiently.

These “Rules of Debate”, as they are called, have not been established by any legal enactment, they have evolved out of common practice and have been defined from time to time by various organisations and business institutions with the result that we have a commonly accepted code of procedure for the management of meetings. In principle, the rules for dealing with motions and amendments arising from any meeting are the same.

Standing Orders

Established organisations and committees usually have their own “Standing Orders” for the regulation of their business meetings. Standing Orders is in fact a set of rules which lay down a specific procedure for the meetings of that organisation or committee and which amplify the common Rules of Debate. It is possible to depart from the Standing Orders providing the meeting agrees.

Agenda and Timetable

An agenda is always necessary at a meeting. It sets out for the guidance of the Chairman the item or items which are to be dealt with by the meeting. It is always advisable for the agenda to be compiled on the basis of a time-table so that provision can be made for all items to be dealt with before the closing time of the meeting. Even at a meeting where there is only one item on the agenda a time-table is necessary if there are to be questions and discussions. In that case a specified time is laid down for the speaker and likewise for the questions and discussion.

During the proceedings the Chairman should aim at conserving time, and if he can keep a little ahead of his time-table, it will provide him with a latitude to cope with unexpected incidents in subsequent items. It is the duty of the Chairman to prevent waste of time, and when he feels that any item under discussion has been adequately dealt with, he should propose to the meeting the closure of that business, and with approval, pass on to the next item on the agenda.

Terms, Rules, and Procedure

Motion
A Motion is a proposition submitted for discussion and vote. It must be positive in its wording and declare an opinion or call for a course of action – or both.

Resolution
A Resolution is a Motion which has been put to the vote and carried.

Amendment
When a Motion is before the meeting an Amendment is a proposition to change the words of the Motion as a whole, or the change certain words, or to add or delete words anywhere in the Motion.

Point of Order
A Point of Order is an objection raised by a member of the audience on the grounds that a speaker is departing from the subject under discussion, or that the Standing Orders are not being observed, or that the recognised rules of debate are not being operated, or that the speaker is using offensive language.

Substantive Motion
When an Amendment is voted on and carried by a majority it replaces or alters the original Motion and then becomes known as the Substantive Motion, to which new Amendments can be moved, providing they are not the same in wording or principle as that in the original Motion which was lost.

Direct Negative
A Direct negative is a proposed amendment to a Motion which offers no alternative proposition but simply seeks to negate the whole Motion. A Direct Negative must therefore always be ruled out of order by the Chairman, since its purpose can be achieved simply by voting against the Motion; and it is thus unnecessary.

Reference Back
Reference Back is a proposition against a report which is under discussion, and may refer to the whole report or a section of it. It means that the meeting does not approve of the report, and wishes the committee which was responsible for drafting it, to alter it in accordance with the objection specified by the mover of the Reference Back.

The Question Be Put
To move that the question be put, means that the discussion should cease and the vote should be taken on the Motion (or Amendment if any) which is before the meeting.

Next Business
Moving Next Business means that the meeting should immediately proceed to the next item of business. It can be moved at any time in reference to any item on the agenda, but if it is moved and carried whilst a Motion or an Amendment is under discussion it dismisses the Motion and Amendment without any vote being taken on them. If Next Business is not carried, then the meeting resumes discussion on the original Motion and Amendment, and thereafter takes the vote on them in the usual way.

Rules of Debate

A Chairman must have knowledge of the Rules of Debate, otherwise he cannot efficiently control discussions on Motions and Amendments, etc. This knowledge is especially necessary when the discussion becomes controversial and numerous propositions are moved.

Except where Standing Orders state to the contrary, the following rules affecting the rights of speech are those which operate in general practice at all ordinary meetings.

All persons moving and seconding Motions and Amendments, etc., and all those who participate in the discussion, must do so standing. The speaker then "has the floor". The only exception to this rule is in committee meetings. Of course if the speaker is physically disabled and unable to stand with ease the Chairman can give him permission to address the meeting without rising to his feet.

A speaker must address his remarks to the Chairman and not to any individual member of the audience even though he may be replying to the previous remarks of an individual.

The mover of a Motion has the right to speak when introducing his Motion and the right to reply to the discussion as the last speaker, before the vote is taken.

If there is nobody willing to second the Motion, after it has been moved, the Motion falls, which means that no discussion can be permitted on it, and the Chairman must pass on to next business.

The seconder of a Motion has the right to speak when seconding but, unlike the mover, he has no right to reply. If he formally seconds the Motion without speaking he has the right to speak during the discussion on it, but he cannot speak twice.

If, during the discussion, the mover wishes to withdraw his motion, he cannot do so without the consent of the seconder and the meeting.

The mover of an Amendment has the right to speak only when introducing it. He has no right of reply to the discussion.

Those taking part in discussion on a Motion are only permitted to speak once.

Anyone who has already spoken on the original Motion loses the right to move or second an Amendment to that Motion.

Specific roles of the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer

Role of the Chair (Chairperson)

The role of a Chair of a voluntary management committee bears all the general responsibilities of management committee officers, and also includes tasks related to voluntary management committee meetings and those associated with broader issues concerning the organisation. Obviously, where the voluntary organisation employs staff most of these tasks should be carried out in conjunction with them.

The Chair has particular responsibilities in relation to management committee meetings including:

- ensuring meetings are run competently
- ensuring discussion and decision-making is democratic and everyone is able to participate fully in meetings
- holding the casting vote in the event of a split decision
- preparing agendas for the meeting (in consultation with the staff and other management committee officers)
- ensuring relevant matters are discussed and appropriate decisions made
- Chairing meetings and ensuring that annual general meetings and extraordinary general meetings are carried out according to the constitution of the organisation

Role of the Secretary

As well as bearing all the general responsibilities of voluntary management committee officers, there are many specific tasks for which the Secretary of an organisation has responsibility. Many of these are the regular practical administrative duties that will be done by staff where the organisation employs paid members of staff. In this sense the secretary is delegating the duties to staff.

The tasks of the Secretary for voluntary management committee meetings can include:

- convening meetings
- booking rooms
- dealing with correspondence
- preparing agendas for meetings (in consultation with the Chair)
- taking the minutes of meetings (although some committees may wish to appoint a minute secretary for this purpose)
- ensuring back-up information is available at meetings where required.

Role of the Treasurer

As well as bearing all the general responsibilities of a voluntary management committee officer, the Treasurer is the person specifically entrusted with the funds of the organisation. In an organisation that employs paid staff they will deal with much of the day-to-day financial business. However, the Treasurer is still responsible for overseeing this and keeping account of the finances. In smaller organisations where there are no paid staff the Treasurer will often deal with the financial transactions and bookkeeping.

The tasks associated with this post are:

- To advise the committee on financial matters, both positive and negative
- To control and account for the organisation's finances
- To issue receipts for all cash received and keep records of that paid out
- To be a counter signatory to any major banking transaction
- To attend meetings of the finance sub-committee (if there is one)
- To oversee bookkeeping
- To prepare the Treasurer's report for the annual general meeting
- To liaise with the appointed Auditor or Independent Examiner for the annual review of accounts
- To advise the organisation's management committee of its financial requirements for the year ahead

For complicated accounting it is advisable to seek professional advice.

From: http://www.scvo.org.uk/information/governance-structures/trustees-and-committees/the-role-of-chair-secretary-treasurer/ (edited)

From The Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations *[Product of an Internet search]*

Minute-taking

A short manual

Minute-taking for beginners

A Citizens Advice Scotland bite-sized e-learning module

1 Introduction

2 Purpose

3 Preparation

4 During the meeting

5 The ABCs of minute-taking

6 Conclusion

Contents

Above is the contents page of a minute-taking manual found on the Internet at:

http://www.caslearning.org.uk/eLearningContent/elearning_content/biteSized/Minute%20taking.pdf

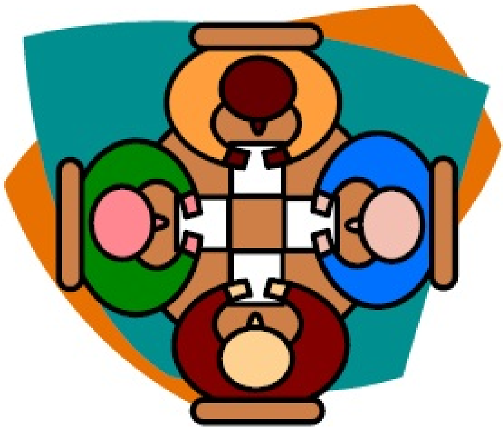
This "Citizens Advice Scotland" manual is a useful, 44-page, interactive, 3.5 MB PDF file. Some may wish to download and use it. But it is too big a file for our CU purposes. Nor will we follow the above contents page.

Instead, our booklet samples some of the highlights of the "Citizens Advice Scotland" booklet, using them as a trigger for our own observations in this 8-page booklet.

Reasons for meetings

Business meetings may be held to:

- brief and inform people
- gather views and opinions
- make decisions
- solve problems
- plan activities
- review activities



Meetings are for a purpose

Minutes are held to assist in the achievement of a purpose, whatever it may be.

Meetings are also very costly.

Each person attending represents "opportunity cost", i.e. time used up that could have been spent on other things. If this is calculated at the rate at which people are paid, it can be found to add up to a large amount in money terms.

The cost of the meeting is this total of all the "opportunity costs", plus the actual costs of preparation, transport, catering, and accommodation. The preparation and distribution of the minutes is not the least of these costs.

Minutes are supposed to harvest the product of the meeting and preserve it.

It will help the minute-taker if he or she has a good idea of the prior aims of the meeting, as well as sensitivity to creative developments that may occur. A meeting is not only held to formalise previous conceptions, but to work on them, and to improve them. If not recorded, all this work and expense will be in vain.

Why we record meetings

We may record meetings to:

- remember what actions were agreed
- remember who agreed to do what
- remember the timescales involved
- outline what was discussed for those who were unable to attend
- explain the reason why a course of action was taken, when looking back later on.

Publication!

The “Citizens Advice Scotland” booklet misses out on the most crucial aspect of minute-taking. This is the publication of the minutes, which, if it does not happen effectively will mean that all the effort put into the minutes will be wasted, and the meeting, too, will have been wasted.

A plan of publication will influence the form that the minutes take; in other words, the minutes should be prepared with a view to publication.

The days are long gone since minutes were hand-written in a book, passed and signed as a true record, and kept in a safe place by the secretary. Nowadays, minutes are circulated in hard-copy and in electronic form, by e-mail. Minutes are circulated as soon as they can be produced, and before they are passed as a true record, which normally only happens at the next meeting of the body or structure.

If the minutes are not circulated, it will be found that allocated tasks are not done, until after the subsequent meeting, which is never the intention.

The best plan, for a monthly meeting of a structure, is to circulate minutes within one week, and then to send out a reminder one week prior to the next meeting. Within this overall pattern, the minutes will be understood as a communication and an essential link in a chain of communication which includes the meeting, and the work of the organisation between meetings, including executive and sub-committee meetings that need to be informed of the decisions of the main meeting.

What kind of meeting is it?

- Some meetings are more formal than others.
- To start with, you may be asked to note an informal meeting like a volunteers' meeting or working group.
- It may be helpful to check with the person who asked you to take minutes what style of minutes are customary for that particular meeting. Also, look at the minutes of the previous meeting.
- Procedures for management committee meetings are laid down more formally.

Yes: But try to leave a clear record, in any case.

What to bring

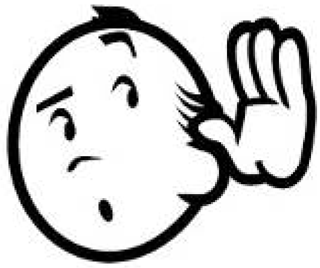
Here are some things to bring to the meeting:

- expenses forms and pens (if required)
- name cards (if required)
- list of apologies in case the Chair asks you to read these out
- copies of the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting
- copies of supporting papers
- either some note paper or a laptop
- your diary or electronic calendar so as to note the date of the next meeting

This may be an adequate list. The first two items may or may not apply, but the other items will nearly always have to be brought to any kind of meeting.

What to listen for

When taking minutes of a business meeting, the most important thing to listen for is:



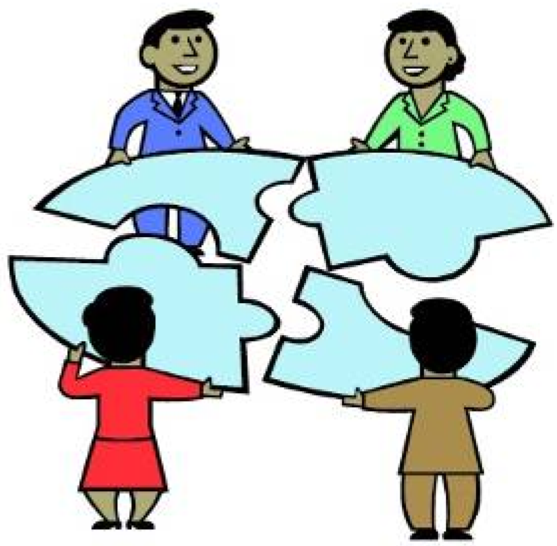
decisions

To record decisions is the most important thing. A good term to use is: **"<u>Agreed</u>..."**.

What is a decision?

A decision is an agreement on action to be taken and covers:

- who... will do...
- what (exactly)
- when
- where
- and sometimes how they will do it and the resources or support they will need



<u>Decisions, decisions</u>

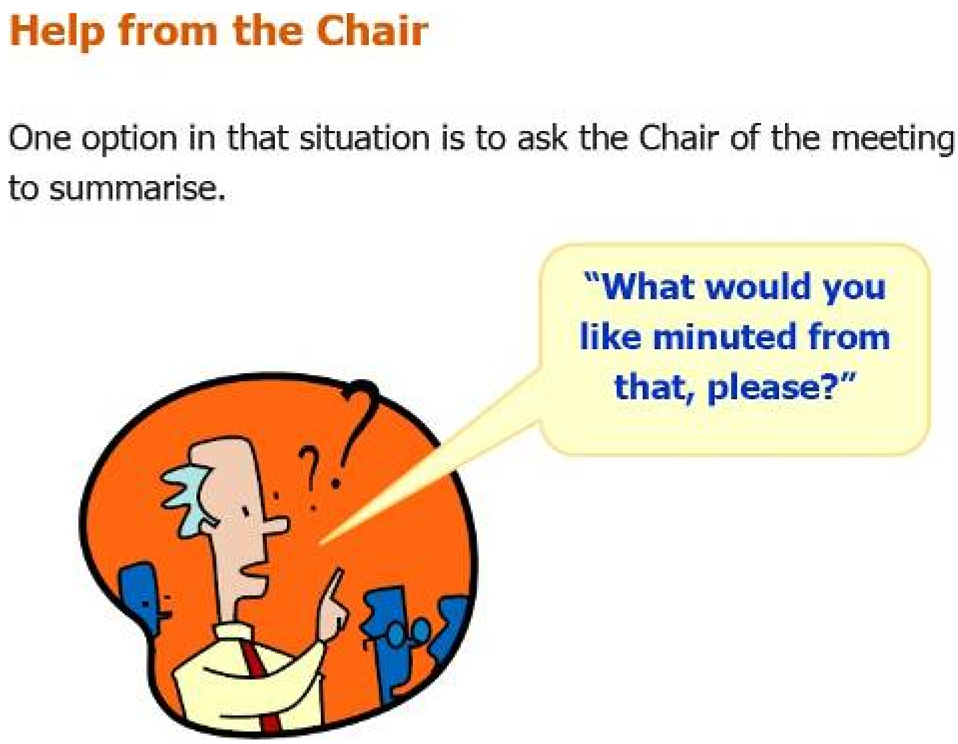
The quality of minutes will be judged by the extent to which decisions are completely and clearly described.

A good minute taker, one who is aware of what a decision should look like, is going to be more likely to write clear decisions that are complete, and not ambiguous.

Agenda

If you are lucky, the Chairperson will announce all decisions in a clear way before moving on to the next item.

It is more likely that some of the decisions will not be announced formally in this way. So, if you are in doubt, then a good option is:



Ask the chairperson to tell you what the decision is.

If there is a clear agenda, the minute-taker will know better what decisions are expected to be recorded. The agenda may begin with Opening, Apologies, Minutes of the Previous Meeting, Approval of the Agenda, and perhaps the singing of an appropriate song. It may end with Announcements and Date of Next Meeting.

In between such standard items that may well be the same from one meeting to another, there will be one or several items that are the special purpose of the particular meeting, and these are where the main decisions will be taken.

If there is a speech and/or a generalised discussion of an educational nature with no result that can be called a decision, requiring action, then the minute-taker need only to record that such a discussion took place, noting appropriate but not elaborate details.

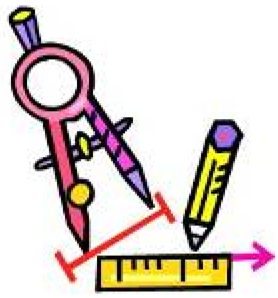
The ABCs of minute-taking

Effective minutes are:

- Accurate
- Brief
- Clear

Absolutely: Accurate, Brief, and Clear

Accurate



A 'true and accurate record' will include:

- time, place and duration of the meeting
- who was present and who gave apologies
- what was decided, when it has to be done by and who will do it (this is normally put in an '**action list**' at the end)
- a brief summary of what was discussed
- who proposed and seconded any motions, and who requested that their dissenting views be noted
- facts are accurate – eg titles of documents and organisations and any financial figures.

How brief?

Think about the number of sheets of paper. If the meeting can be recorded on one or two sides of an A4 sheet of paper, that will be very convenient for all concerned. Minutes can also be done in booklet form.

Action lists

It is helpful for minutes to include a list of actions at the end, summarising who will do what and when.

A table can be a useful way to present this information.

The action list from the previous meeting is often reviewed at the start of the next one so that members can see how matters are progressing.

Don’t forget to remind the Chairperson: **<u>Fix the date of the next meeting</u>!**

Preparing to Write

A Conspectus of Tony Buzan's "Use Your Head"

Tony Buzan's book, "Use Your Head", is addressed to students who need to learn how to learn. It is also an effective manual of preparation for report-writing. Buzan breaks the task down to three main skills: Reading, Remembering, and Note-Making.

Reading

The eyes have to pause to take in the printed material. Therefore the eyes stop and start repeatedly as you read. Slow readers also "back-skip". In other words, they read the same words, sentences and paragraphs more than once.

Reading will be much faster if the jumps are longer and if more is taken in each time the eyes stop. This means taking in several words at a time. Buzan says that this is not only possible, but also easier, and results in less fatigue and better understanding.

To avoid "back-skipping" and to build the habit of making bigger jumps, Buzan recommends that readers lead the eyes with a finger or other pointer and that readers practise taking in more words at each stop (called a "fixation"). Here are some quotes from the book:

"If eyes moved over print in the smooth manner . . . they would be able to take in nothing, because the eye can see things clearly only when it can 'hold them still'. If an object is still, the eye must be still in order to see it . . .

"Relating all this to reading, it is obvious that if the eyes are going to take in words, and if the words are still, the eyes will have to pause on each word before moving on. Rather than moving in smooth lines . . . the eyes in fact move in a series of stops and quick jumps.

"The jumps themselves are so quick as to take almost no time, but the fixations can take anywhere from ¼ to 1½ seconds. A person who normally reads one word at a time – and who skips back over words and letters – is forced, by the simple mathematics of his eye movements, into reading speeds which are often well below 100 wpm (words per minute) and which mean that he will not be able to understand much of what he reads, nor be able to read much.

"It might seem at first glance that the slow reader is doomed, but the problem can be solved, and in more than one way:

1. Skipping back over words can be eliminated, as 90 per cent of back-skipping is based on fear and is unnecessary for understanding . . .
2. The time for each fixation can be reduced to approach the ¼ second minimum – the reader need not fear that this is too short a time, for his eye is able to register as many as five words in one-hundredth of a second.
3. The size of the fixation can be expanded to take in as many as three to five words at a time.

"This solution might at first seem impossible if it is true that the mind deals with one word at a time. In fact the mind can equally well fixate on *groups* of words, which is better in nearly all ways: When we read a sentence we do not read it for the individual meaning of each word, but for the meaning of the phrases in which the words are contained.

"The slower reader has to do more mental work than the faster reader because he has to add the meaning of each word to the meaning of each following word.

"Another advantage for the faster reader is that his eyes will be doing less physical work on each page. Rather than having as many as 500 fixations tightly focused per page as does the slow reader, he will have as few as 100 fixations per page, each one of which is less muscularly fatiguing.

"Yet another advantage is that the rhythm and flow of the faster reader will carry him comfortably through the meaning, whereas the slow reader, because of his stopping and starting, jerky approach, will be far more likely to become bored, to lose concentration, to mentally drift away and to lose the meaning of what he is reading.

"It can be seen from this that a number of the commonly held beliefs about faster readers are false:

1. *Words must be read one at a time:* ***Wrong.*** Because of our ability to fixate and because we read for meaning rather than for single words.
2. *Reading faster than 500 wpm is impossible:* ***Wrong.*** Because the fact that we can take in as many as six words per fixation and the fact that we can make four fixations a second means that speeds of 1000 wpm are perfectly feasible.
3. *The faster reader is not able to appreciate:* ***Wrong.*** Because the faster reader will be understanding more of the meaning of what he reads, will be concentrating on the material more, and will have considerably more time to go back over areas of special interest and importance to him.

4. *Higher speeds give lower concentration:* ***Wrong.*** Because the faster we go the more impetus we gather and the more we concentrate.

5. *Average reading speeds are natural and therefore the best:* ***Wrong.*** Because average reading speeds are not natural. They are speeds produced by an incomplete initial training in reading, combined with an inadequate knowledge of how the eye and the brain work at the various speeds possible.

“Apart from the general advice given above, some readers may be able to benefit from the following . . .

1. **Visual aid techniques:** When children learn how to read they often point their finger to the words they are reading. We have traditionally regarded this as a fault and have told them to take their fingers off the page. It is now realised that it is we and not the children who are at fault. Instead of insisting that they remove their fingers we should ask them to move their fingers faster . . .

2. **Expanded focus:** In conjunction with visual aid techniques, the reader can practise taking in more than one line at a time. This is certainly not physically impossible and is especially useful on light material or for overviewing and previewing. It will also improve normal reading speeds. It is very important always to use a visual guide during this kind of reading, as without it the eye will tend to wander . . .

3. **High speed perception:** This exercise involves turning pages as fast as possible attempting to see as many words per page as possible. This form of training will increase the ability to take in large groups of words per fixation, will be applicable to overviewing and previewing techniques, and will condition the mind to much more rapid and efficient general reading practices . . .

4. **Motivational practice:** Most reading is done at a relaxed and almost lackadaisical pace, a fact of which many speed reading courses have taken advantage. Students are given various exercises and tasks, and it is suggested to them that after each exercise their speed will increase by 10-20 wpm. And so it does, often by as much as 100 per cent over the duration of the lessons. The increase, however, is often due not to the exercises, but to the fact that the student’s motivation has been eked out bit by bit during the course . . .

5. **Metronome training:** A metronome, which is usually used for keeping musical rhythm, can be most useful for both reading and high speed reading practices. If you set it at a reasonable pace, each beat can indicate a single sweep for your visual aid. In this way a steady and smooth rhythm can be maintained and the usual slowdown that occurs after a little while can be avoided. Once the most comfortable rhythm has been found, your reading speed can be improved by occasionally adding an extra beat per minute.

Remembering

Tony Buzan looks at the learning period, and after.

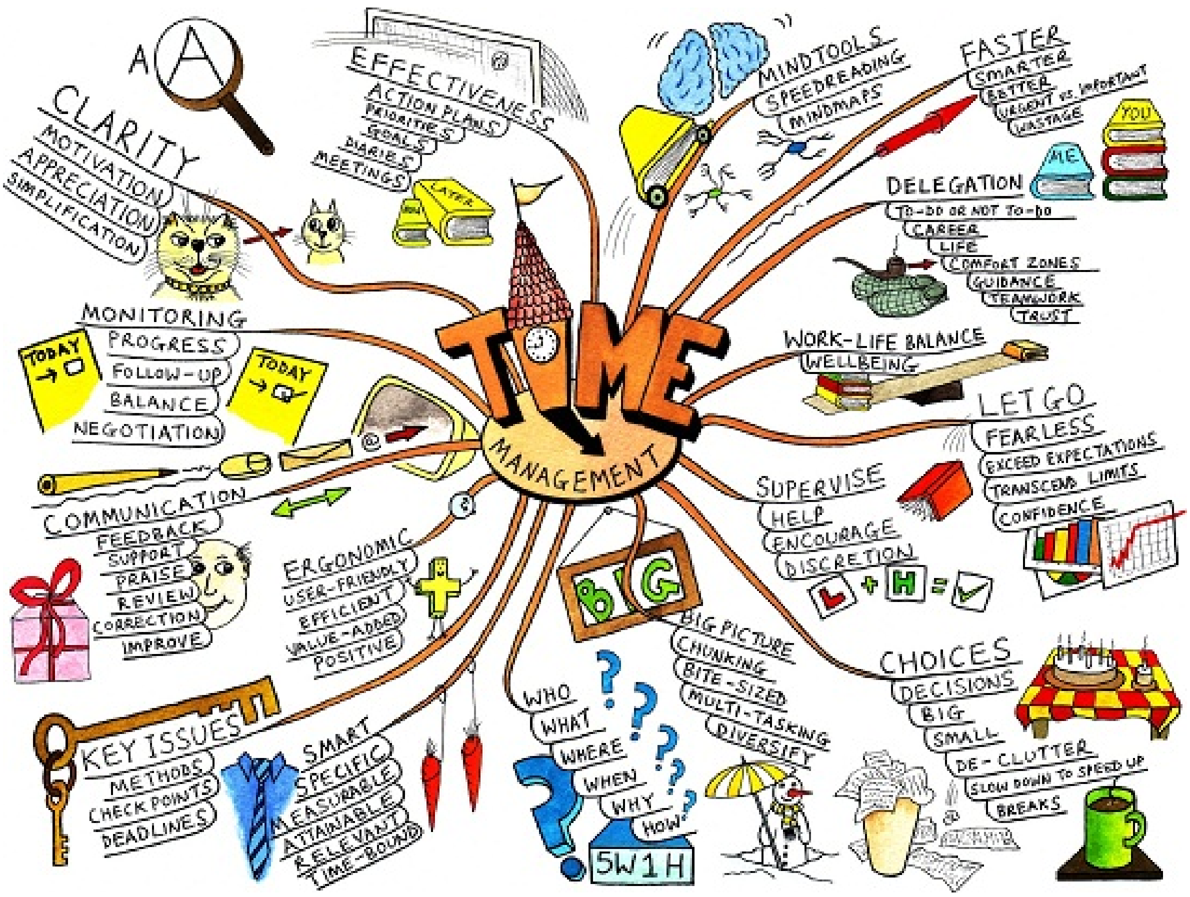
During the learning period (which could be reading, or a class, lecture, or workshop) he says that students remember more from the beginning and the end, with a dip in the middle. Therefore, he says, breaks should be taken every 20-40 minutes (making more ‘beginnings’ and ‘ends’).

After the learning period, according to the research quoted by Buzan, knowledge tails off to almost nothing unless there is systematic review, or revision. It does not have to be extended on each occasion. Little and often is the best way.

Just these simple techniques of taking breaks and doing frequent small reviews will increase your retention of learnt material. Buzan also describes special memory techniques. These all seem to rely on associating things together in imaginative ways, an idea which Buzan picks up again in his note-making section.

Note-Making

Buzan’s **‘mind-map’** technique is not so just a way of making notes. It is even more useful as a way of organising material for output, such as a report or an article.



A Buzan “Mind-Map”

Buzan argues that conventional written students' notes are linear, whereas the material is always 'multi-ordinate', meaning that each word or concept connects in many possible ways, which cannot be shown in a list or serial form.

Instead of starting at the top left-hand corner, the mind-mapper starts in the middle. A mind-map is the 'big picture'. It is the forest, not just the trees. It is a 'helicopter view' of the topic. In Marxist terms, it is the 'concrete' view of the 'abstract' parts. It should be dialectical. It is 'organic', and not eclectic. It is always a one-page thing.

Here are some instructions for a mind-map:

1. Survey the materials to be studied; find the major topics.
2. Use paper **turned sideways**, any good sized paper will do, A4 is suitable.
3. **Put the title of the major topic in the centre of the page.**
4. Enclose this title in some shape, but a picture is best.
5. Survey the material again to find the main sub-topics.
6. Write a title for each sub-topic on a line which radiates out from the centre topic.
7. Survey again to find any subsidiary topics still not covered.
8. Put branching lines from the sub-topic line to represent the subsidiary topics.
9. Give a title to each of these last drawn lines.
10. At the end of the final lines write in any details that are essential to the topic.

Then it lists 'Additional Aids', as follows:

1. Use abbreviations as often as possible, develop your own personal shorthand.
2. Colour-code branch lines to highlight hierarchies.
3. Outline each sub-topic with a different colour. This defines its outlines, limits, contents and close relationships.
4. Use coloured arrows to link parts of your notes to show relationships.
5. Pictures aid memory, so devise them for yourself.

The Buzan Organic Study Method

The Browse

"Before doing anything else, it is *essential* to 'browse' or look through the entire book or periodical you are about to study. The browse should be done in the way you would look through a book you were considering buying in a bookshop, or in the way you would look through a book you were considering taking out from the library. In other words casually, but rather rapidly, flipping through the pages, getting the general 'feel' of the book, observing the organisation and structure, the level of difficulty, the proportion of diagrams and illustrations to text, the location of any results, summaries and conclusions sections etc. . . .

Time and Amount

“The first thing to do when sitting down to study a text book is to decide on the period of time to be devoted to it. Having done this, decide what amount to cover in the time allocated . . .

“In study, making a decision about Time and Amount gives us immediate chronological and volume terrain, as well as an end point or goal. This has the added advantage of enabling the proper linkages to be made rather than encouraging a wandering off in more disconnected ways . . .

“A further advantage of making these decisions at the outset is that the underlying fear of the unknown is avoided. If a large study book is plunged into with no planning, the reader will be continually oppressed by the number of pages he eventually has to complete. Each time he sits down he will be aware that he still has a ‘few hundred pages to go’ and will be studying with this as a constant and real background threat. If, on the other hand, he has selected a reasonable number of pages for the time he is going to study, he will be reading with the knowledge that the task he has set himself is easy and can certainly be completed . . .

“There are still further reasons for making these time and amount decisions which are concerned with the distribution of the reader’s effort as time goes on.

“Imagine that you have decided to study for two hours and that the first half-an-hour has been pretty difficult, although you have been making some progress. At this point in time you find that understanding begins to improve and that your progress seems to be getting better and faster.

“Would you pat yourself on the back and take a break?

“Or would you decide to keep the new and better rhythm going by studying for a while until you began to lose the new impetus?

“Ninety per cent of people asked those questions would carry on. Of those who would take a break, only a few would recommend the same thing to anyone else!

“And yet surprisingly the best answer *is* to take a break. The reason for this can be seen by referring back to the discussion in the chapter on Memory (see above – DT) and the amount that is recalled from a period of learning. Despite the fact that understanding may be continually high, the recall of that understanding will be getting worse if the mind is not given a break . . . It is essential that any time period for studying be broken down into 20-40 minute sections with small rests in between.

"To assist even further, do a quick review of what you have read and a preview of what you are about to read at the beginning and end of each study period . . .

Noting of Knowledge on the Subject

"Having decided on the amounts to be covered, next jot down as much as you know on the subject as fast as you can. (2-5 minutes). Notes should be in key words and creative pattern form (mind map).

Asking questions – Defining Goals

"Having established the current state of knowledge on the subject, it is advisable to decide what you want from the book. This involves defining the questions you want answered during the reading. The questions should be asked in the context of goals aimed for and should, like the noting of knowledge, be done in key word and mind map form . . . (2-5 minutes).

Study Overview

"One of the interesting facts about people using study books is that most, when given a new text, start reading on page one. It is *not* advisable to start reading a new study text on the first page . . .

"What is essential in a reasonable approach to study texts, especially difficult ones, is to get a good idea of what's in them before plodding on into a learning catastrophe . .

"What this means in a study context is that you should scour the book for all the material not included in the regular body of the print, using your visual guide as you do so. Areas of the book to be covered in your overview include:

results	**tables**	**subheadings**
summaries	**table of contents**	**dates**
conclusions	**marginal notes**	**italics**
indents	**illustrations**	**graphs**
glossaries	**capitalised words**	**footnotes**
back cover	**photographs**	**statistics**
index	**bibliography**	**acknowledgements**

Preview

"During the preview, concentration should be directed to the beginnings and ends of paragraphs, sections, chapters, and even whole texts, because information tends to be concentrated at the beginnings and ends of written material.

“If you are studying a short academic paper or a complex study book, the Summary Results and Conclusion sections should always be read first. These sections often include exactly those essences of information that you are searching for, enabling you to grasp that essence without having to wade through a lot of time-wasting material.

“The value of this section cannot be overemphasised. A case in point is that of a student taught at Oxford who had spent four months struggling through a 500-page tome on psychology. By the time he had reached page 450 he was beginning to despair because the amount of information he was ‘holding on to’ as he tried to get to the end was becoming too much – was literally beginning to drown in the information just before reaching his goal.

“It transpired that he had been reading straight through the book, and even though he was nearing the end, did not know what the last chapter was about. It was a complete summary of the book! He read the section and estimated that had he done so at the beginning he would have saved himself approximately 70 hours in reading time, 20 hours in note-taking time, and a few hundred hours of worrying.

Books are commodities like everything else in bourgeois society. Authors are compelled to pad up their writing to the required length to make a saleable book.

Difficult Sections

“Moving on from a difficult area releases the tension and mental floundering that often accompanies the traditional approach.

“’Jumping over’ a stumbling block usually enables the reader to go back to it later on with more information from the ‘other side’. The block itself is seldom essential for the understanding of that which follows it.

Review

“In this stage simply fill in all those areas as yet incomplete, and reconsider those sections marked as noteworthy. In most cases it will be found that not much more than 70 per cent of that initially considered relevant will finally be used. Then complete your mind map notes.”

Tony Buzan’s web site is at: http://www.tonybuzan.com/

Report Writing, Correspondence and Filing

and other necessary capacities

<u>Report Writing</u>

In the previous part we saw that it is quite easy to organise material into a whole piece of work, in outline, using a Tony Buzan-style "Mind Map", "The Buzan Organic Study Method", and other such techniques.

All of what Buzan has to say about reading and study is relevant to the topic of report writing, and especially relevant to the preparation stage of report-writing.

In a report, you must be concrete, which is the same as being organic. The true meaning of the word "concrete" is the combination of the ("abstract") parts of a whole situation in such a way that it can be understood as a "unity and struggle of opposites".

This is what Lenin referred to as "concrete analysis of a concrete situation". It corresponds very well with the typical form of Buzan's "mind-maps".

A concrete, organic approach to report-writing will help you to make your report as brief as possible.

The length of any report should be tailored to fit the amount of time a reader, person or committee may have available to deal with it. This might be as little as fifteen minutes, or half an hour for something more important. Such might be the only opportunity for the matter to be considered, and for the people to give attention to it.

Success of a report should be judged by whether it can give rise to an appropriate decision, in the available time.

Therefore everything possible should be done to help the recipients of a report to understand its conclusions.

This can be done in the first place by presenting the report "backwards". The conclusions should be made very clear on the first page.

This might be done with a paragraph headed "Summary", or "Conclusions". There is no point in being shy about this.

Empirical facts can be given, or summarised, in an addendum, if necessary.

Tabulations (spreadsheets) often help to concentrate the presentation of data in a small space, and with a prominent “bottom line”.

Your audience will undoubtedly appreciate it if your report is the proverbial “one-pager”, or else a “two-page report” which can be printed back-to-back on one sheet of paper.

If it is a bit longer, then it may be possible to print it legibly as a four-page folding “booklet”, so that it is still on one sheet of paper.

Write in Prose

Prose is in paragraphs, and has a beginning, middle and end. Prose does not rely on bullets, numbers, letters or other listing mechanisms.

Correspondence

The Secretary of any structure is responsible for its correspondence, and especially for its letters or official e-mails. Responsible for receiving them, for replying to them, and for keeping the messages received and sent and copies of replies. The secretary must report correspondence to the organisation in a way that is regular, convenient and timely.

Filing

Filing is the storage of documents in a classified manner such that they can be searched by date, or alphabetically, or by some numbered referencing or catalogue system.

Files and a hole-puncher used to be the tools of filing. But now, files are kept in computers, and sometimes in both forms.

Other necessary capacities

Computers

Not much has changed in the last 20 years. The most necessary programmes are still four in number: word processing, spreadsheets, e-mail and Internet-browsing.

Typically, people use MS-Word and Excel for words and numbers.

E-mail software is a little more varied: Outlook is good, but so is Thunderbird. In browsers, Google Chrome is good, but .

A little capacity for simple manipulation of image-files is good to have. This can be got from the free programme called “Paint” that comes with “Windows”.

Layout

The appearance of documents has a major effect on whether they are read and understood, or not. This is a factor that is relatively, though not completely, independent of the text, or content

A well-laid-out document will go further. It will be read and absorbed by far more people than if the same text is badly produced.

Hence layout, which at first seems to be a subjective matter having to do with taste and pride, turns out to be an objective factor which eventually becomes an iron necessity.

This is because documents compete for attention. The documents of the revolutionaries have to be presented well if they are to stand a chance of getting the attention that they must have, if they are to be effective, and have consequences.

Presentation is equally a factor, whether the documents are internal, or external to any given organisation or structure of an organisation.

Venues

Just as the presentation of text on paper, or on a screen, strongly affects the take-up of any message, and so becomes a major material factor, so also does the layout of any venue for gathering, as well as the acoustics of a venue.

Venues can be considered as being of three types. The first is the "**boardroom**", or "council chamber". This type of arrangement is conducive to participation by all those present, in more-or-less equal degrees of prominence. An oval table is better than a rectangle, for example.

This is the type of venue that the Communist University uses, and looks for.

The second type is "**classroom**", or a lecture theatre. It is suitable for lectures. It gives prominence and priority to the platform. It disadvantages the floor. It is conducive to "questions of clarity" but not to "contributions".

The third is the "**stadium**", which is equivalent to the "classroom" but on a larger scale. A stadium works well for rallies. Audience participation does takes place, but only in forms such as cheering and singing, or of booing and walking out.

Timetable and Agenda

This is an induction course, designed to show how structures work. If they are not given "quality" time, they cannot work. If agendas are filled with ad hoc tasks, and if the organic functioning of the organisation is consequently denied time, then it is going to die away.

In COSATU, Shop Stewards Councils are turned into rallies and demonstrations. In the SACP, gatherings at all levels are turned into no more than distributions of tasks by leadership. In the ANC, branch activity is suppressed or suspended. None of these are invariable tendencies but all of them do exist.

It is the healthy functioning of the base units of the organisations that regenerates and cleans the organisations. It has to be given time.

Writing

Writing comes first because it is the ordering art of so many other arts.

In politics, writing is indispensable. Most of our cadres need to be able to write. By being able to write is meant more than to be literate, just as being literate means more than to be able to read.

The question of language will mainly be left to the final CU course, which will just be on Languages. Suffice it to say that we need writers in all languages used in South Africa, and not just in the 11 official ones. We need people who can at least handle text in French, Portuguese, Swahili, and Arabic, too.

But in this item, we are talking about writing in general. What advice can we give?

The purpose of writing is to be understood. Political writing is better when it is shorter. To compose your thoughts, use “Mind Maps”, as described in the attached text. To organise your research, follow the “Organic Study Guide” contained in the document, and similar advice.

Write in Prose. Prose is in paragraphs, and it has a beginning, middle and end. Prose does not rely on bullets, numbers, letters or other listing mechanisms.

A good way to start writing is to write in a way that is adapted from the way you speak. If you can make yourself understood in speech, then you should be able to make yourself as well understood with the same words on paper. Then you can improve. There is no requirement for you to be pompous. Simplicity is best.

Political writing is better when shorter. Nearly all kinds of writing are limited as to length. Therefore make a habit of watching the number of words in any piece of writing (your own, and whenever possible, other people’s.

On the next page is a rough indication of the kinds of length required for different kinds of writing. From this chart it can be seen that each succeeding kind of project can be built up by repeating elements like the preceding, smaller ones. Writing is modular, like bricklaying. The modules are small. Short sentences and short paragraphs are best in political writing, and in journalism. If you can write a sentence, then you can write a book.

Item	Length (+/-)
Sentence	10 words
Paragraph	50 words
Letter to the Editor	300 words
Press Release/Newspaper Report	300 words
Article ("op ed" or "feature")	750 words
Speech (100 words per minute)	1 500 words
Essay	2 500 words
Chapter of a book	5 000 words
Book of ten chapters	50 000 words

Reading goes with writing. Both are habits. Keep reading, and keep writing, like breathing in and breathing out. Try to write for people. Any readers are good readers. Even a small amount of feedback is extremely instructive.

Writing should be a pleasure. The Chilean communist writer Volodia Teitelboim used to say that writing was the easiest way he knew of being happy. Lenin described himself as a writer. Lenin's style became clearer and clearer and he became more experienced. Lenin's style is a good model of shortness combined with clarity.

Editing

All writing is edited. If it was not, it could not be constrained to fit the space available, which is always limited. The time that readers have for reading is also limited.

Editing is done in all sorts of ways. Usually it means, in the first place, selection. Editors pick, from a very wide field, a much smaller, limited amount of material. The criteria for selection may be political, or some other quality, like a special interest of a group of readers, or a sectional appeal such as to women, youth, educators.

Editing can also mean removal of excess and repetition from a text. This is often referred to a "redaction", from the French word for "editor", which is *"redacteur"*. Redaction that takes out whole passages, paragraphs and sentences is a quick way to reduce length

The Communist University is a product of editing. It has been constructed by a combined process of selection and redaction; while the openings to discussion of the short texts, are equivalent to the "Editorials" in a newspaper, which are the editor's own voice.

Sub-editing

Sub-editing is also called (in USA English) copy-editing. Sub-editing is the writing of articles as they are going to be printed, as opposed to reporting, which is the gathering of stories. Reporters may sub-edit their own material to an extent, but the sub-editor is the one who must adjust the material to fit the space available. Sub-editors are the real writers of newspapers. Their techniques are the best.

Length per Page

This varies widely and is affected by all other variables. In a broadsheet newspaper page there can be thousands of words on one page. On a booklet page there might be 300 words. On an A4 page there may be as many as 500, or in a print-magazine page with graphics and in columns, more than 600 words.

Headlines

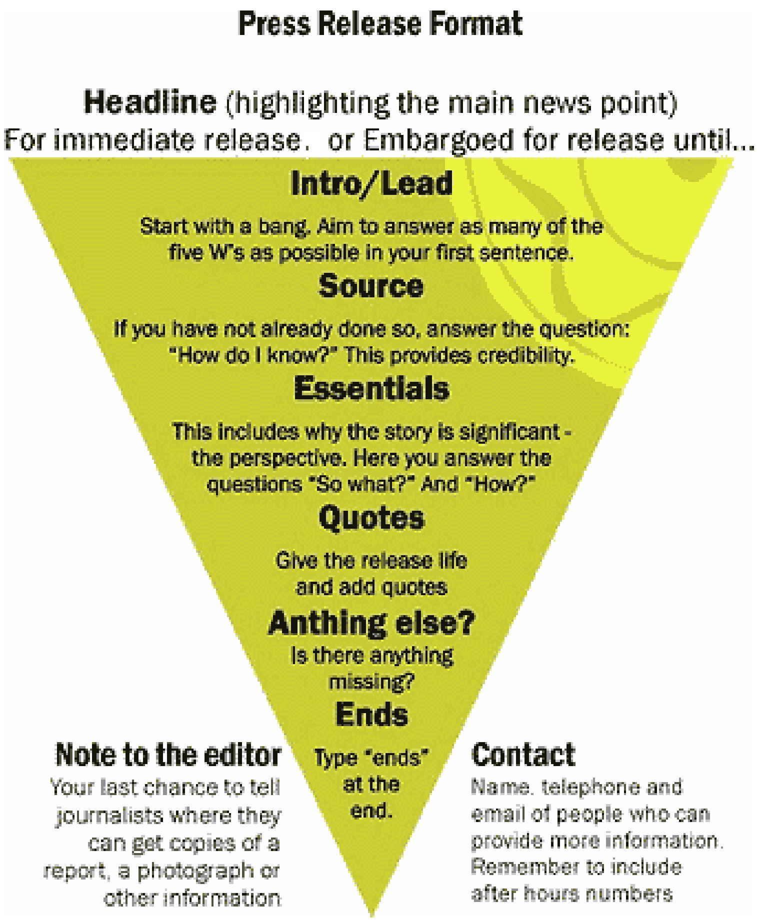
Headlines in newspapers and magazines are added by sub-editors, and not by the writers of articles. Headlines need to be short, so that they can be fat. Sub-headings, like the ones used on this page, help to break up slabs of text and make it easier to read.

Web sites

Web sites are not limited in the way that hard-copy printed material is limited. Hence the natural discipline of the print medium is not felt, with the result that there is enormous length used sometimes on the Internet, which is never likely to be read. Hence attention to word-count is very important when writing and editing for the Internet or e-mail.

Illustration

An illustration that would express the nature of subtraction might be one of stone-carving, where the waste or surplus is chiselled away so as to reduce and shape the initial block down to what is wanted. Addition could be illustrated by an image of bricklaying, or of "**3D Printing**". But suitable images were hard to find, so we have used the illustration of **Additive** and **Subtractive** colour.



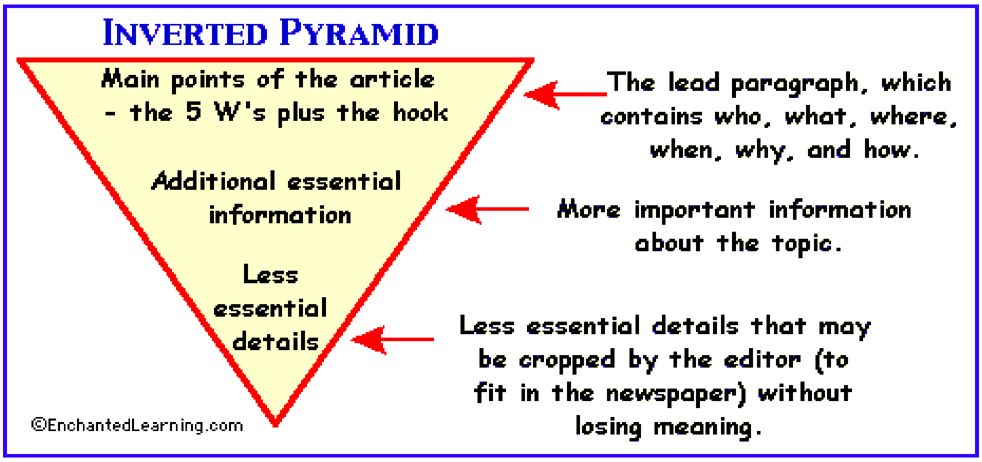
Press releases

A press release (media release) is a pre-written story, given by an interested party to a journalist for the journalist to publish. These press releases, nowadays, go out by e-mail.

If you define it like that, then everything else about a press release will follow logically. Everything is done in a way that is designed to save the journalist work, and time.

The press release must be short. It should not be longer than the space that the newspaper or radio programme will have available. This is because anything that is longer will have to be cut, and cutting down a text is work, that takes time. The journalists don't have any spare time.

The press release must be written in a style that is usable, or easily adjustable for use, in a newspaper or a radio bulletin. This means short sentences.



The press release should be on one topic only. For another topic, send another press release. If it is not possible to do this (e.g. after an executive meeting covering many topics), the press release should be clearly divided, with sub-headings.

The press release must be immediately verifiable. This means that the journalist must be able to confirm, usually by telephone, that you are the source of the press release. If the journalist cannot do this, then the story will be dropped at once.

At the bottom of your press release you should put "Issued by:" and follow that with the organisation that is issuing the statement.

Immediately after that, you should put "Contact:" and follow it with your name and cell phone number. You can also put your land-line number and e-mail address, and all details including your physical whereabouts; but the cell number is the crucial one.

Logo and Date

If you have a logo, use it at the top and centre. Under it, you can put the name of the organisation in text, even if it is clear in the logo. The reason is that your recipient's system may strip off the logo and leave only text. Put the date there at the top, as well.

A Good "Subject" line

Your message needs a good "Subject" line. This is not exactly like a newspaper headline, but it must tell the journalist plainly what the statement is about. It goes in the "Subject" field of the e-mail, and it goes above the text of the message. Shorter is better.

Some people like to make a quotation that the journalist can use, like, say: President Zuma said: "The National Development Plan will help us to work together." The words in quotation marks are supposed to be the original words of the person, which

the journalist can then use in the article. This point is made in the graphic below. By the way, there is no shortage of advice on press releases on the Internet.

Sample Press Release

Month Day, Year

Headlines are Meant to Summarize the Topic of the Release

Subheads can go into more detail, but make sure they don't take away from the impact of your headline

CITY, State – The who, what, when, and where and why should all be included in one or two, to-the-point sentences. For example: Led by Joe Schmoe (City, State) and Jane Doe (City, State), the Boulder Barnstormers mounted a second half comeback against the Sarasota Fliers to win 15-14 and take home the Our City Classic title held at the Pleasantview Fields in "City", "State" Saturday.

"A good way to get a point across without sounding like it's an opinion is to have someone from the event or game that you are writing about give a quote that summarizes the point you are trying to get across," said the Barnstormers Joe Schmoe. "After you mention the comeback, let Joe Schmoe tell it in his words to back you up. You add to the release by having a reliable source reiterate what you already wrote."

The rest of the release should complement the beginning paragraphs. Put additional information, peripheral details and any tantalizing facts that make your release seem newsworthy.

Be sure to add local ties to the release that will make it more interesting. Even if you have a great team from another state in town for the tournament, your local media will still be more interested in the local players and teams participating.

Put your wrap-up paragraph at the end. If you didn't already mention the next day's match-ups or times, this is when you should do it. If it is a pre-event release this is a good place to recap what happened last year.

For more information please contact "your name or whoever will be in charge of media", at email@wherever.com - 555-555-5555 ph. – 555-555-5555 fax
For more information online please visit www.tournament_or_organizationsite.com
For more information on the sport of Ultimate, please visit www.upa.org

What is also possible to do, but is hardly ever done, is to record a quotation, or a portion of a speech, and attach it to your press release as a sound file. This will help with radio, especially.

But as a rule, don't use attachments when sending out press releases. Paste your text in the body of the message.

Press Releases as a news medium

Where there is a reception for it, your press release can go, and it is better for you that your full original message is read by those you wish to reach, as opposed to the edited one with contradictory statements added, that the newspaper may actually print.

For this reason, in South Africa, it has become normal to send press releases out as widely as possible. Press releases have the potential to by-pass the newspaper and broadcast media to a significant extent, and so to become a medium themselves.

Distribution list

E-mail distribution lists can be Google or Yahoo Groups, or they can be your own home-made list-serve, but you need them to be sending e-mail to addresses that are in use and not defunct.

E-mail that goes direct is what you want, and not a system that sends a message just to say there is a message. You want your message to appear in the in-box of your recipient, in such a way that the recipient can read the "Subject" line, and maybe the first few words of the message. You want it to be that if the journalist clicks on the message, he or she will immediately get the message, open, in full.

Distribution lists require a lot of maintenance. You need to be adding subscribers all the time. This is labour-intensive work. Therefore think twice before opening too many such lists.

On the other hand, get yourself on to as many as possible of other people's lists so as to read their media releases, contrast and compare them with each other and with yours, and learn from how they do it.

Embargo?

Most people don't bother with the "embargo" and "for immediate release" tags. Most of the time, they are superfluous. It is better to save "embargo" for the very occasional and rare times that it is really needed.

What is the purpose of Political Education?

The main purpose of political education is to prepare cadres who can do the work of the organisation. As soon as a leadership is formed it begins to deplete, because comrades are deployed to higher structures. Others move away. For these reasons the branch needs to generate a steady stream of new cadres who are ready to take up the leadership and administration of the branch.

When political education is carried out consistently, it also becomes a way of recruiting new members. Ordinary citizens may be persuaded to attend classes, even though they might not be ready to pay a membership fee and join the organisation.

At regular and frequent political education gatherings a lot of information can be announced about branch and other activities (e.g. BGMs, campaigns, events of fraternal organisations).

What form does Political Education take?

Because Political Education is intended to contribute to change in the world, it must take the form of a dialogue between people. The "bucket-and-tap" form of presentation, where students are buckets and the teacher is a tap, is no good for the purpose of Political Education.

Therefore the form of Political Education is as follows:

There is a short text. This is given so as to focus dialogue around a particular topic.

There is no lecturer. One of the students has the task of opening the discussion. For the remainder of the session (total time of the session is one and a half hours), the participants discuss.

There is a chairperson. The job of the chairperson is to encourage all participants to join in. The participants are supposed to become political cadres. Therefore they cannot afford to be shy when talking about politics, and still less so when they are safe among their own comrades. The chairperson encourages and protects them.

The process is almost completely self-sustaining. It requires next to no inputs from above: no funding, no prescription, no infrastructure, no supervision, no report-backs, no cost. It requires somebody to get some suitable texts and to distribute them with invitations to attend at a venue and time, according to a schedule. The biggest difficulty is preparing and updating a database and communicating regularly with the people on the list (see below).

Texts

The question of what texts to put in front of a group is not the most critical one. The requirement is that the text must be sufficient to generate dialogue of a political nature between the participants. There must be no sense of indoctrination or drilling involved. There should probably be a good mixture in the first place between classic political texts, on the one hand, and current documents and even journalism. There should be no sense of sectarian division between the Alliance Partners.

Study groups in general, however, would always be well advised to devote an early session or two to the question of why they are there, and how they will work. For example, they could discuss this document. At a session early in their series they should probably discuss something like Chapter Two of Paulo Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed". It is necessary that they apply their minds to what they are trying to achieve, and why.

The study group has no standing in the democracy of the organisation. It does not elect delegates or vote on motions. As a result it is free from any requirement of coming to decisions or conclusions. Therefore it is not concerned to arrive at any line, orthodox or otherwise. It opens up matters for discussion, bringing them to the attention of participants. It is the other, higher, structures of the organisation that will come to conclusions and make decisions for action.

National Democratic Revolutionary Alliance

Contents